(In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.)

THE VICEGERENT OF GOD ON EARTH

by

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Prefatory Notes

Religion is not at present in the good books of what is commonly called "culture," and for obvious reasons. The Religion of Law, which had at one time a direct appeal to the human mind, has given way to Ceremonialism; and the Religion of Grace is merely a religion of Sacraments—admittedly a replica or relic of Paganism. It is not a matter for surprise, then, if both forms of religion have failed to find favour with men of reason and learning.

Everything in the dumb and unconscious world is on the right path to perfection. It has been set on that path by the First Intelligent Cause, and brings forth gradually all that it has to bring. Man, the supreme achievement of Creation, could not

be left without this guidance. The reasonable attitude on such subjects acknowledges him as one supplied with infinite capacities. But for thousands of years most of the forces reposed in man remained in abeyance. Modern research has brought us to material progress, but it has also increased the measure of human misery that has been clouding humanity's progress from the very beginning; and that is because the moral forces hidden in us have had no chance of development. So we see that man is in dire need of the same guidance on the plane of consciousness which has been given to other occupants of the universe. Design has now been universally admitted to be a salient feature of the whole creation, but that same design somehow seems to have missed fire in the case of man. Man appears to surpass the whole of nature in his possession of wonderful capacities, but he is groping in the dark. The Hand behind the scene is guiding everything to its goal. If He is so far providing for the body, can He remain indifferent to the

mind? Revelation from on High should surely concern itself with the latter. It is no question of simply glorifying God with our lips—He has no need of such perfunctory praise. His glory lies in the accomplishment of the object which He had in mind in creating all things in the world, including man.

All I intend to show is just this, that the whole object of Revelation has all along been the same, and that it reached finality in the Qur-an.

But here I have a word to spare for the Secularist. Even an atheist cannot dispense with Law; he is as much its slave as others are, so I ask him first to disabuse his mind of all that he has hitherto thought or heard of religion in general, and consider the case of Islam for a while. He himself is not without a creed, which is none other than the Religion of Obedience to Law. Islam literally means just that; though, technically, it signifies Divine Laws, which in their turn have been styled in scientific terms Laws of Nature. A mere difference in phraseology should not disturb a mind which is free from bias, if the two words mean the same

thing. Such a mind may regard God and Divine Laws, so often spoken of in these pages, as a substitute for Nature and natural Laws. It may do the same in the case of the Divine attributes to which I have referred in this article. It may look to them as morals exhibited by Nature, and then judge for itself whether the message given by the Qur-an was not the one we needed most for the justification of our very existence on the earth. The Qur-an came to lift us to the height of civilization in all the pursuits of life. It was the first Book to define the real constituents of human civilization and to teach us how to achieve it. The Muslims remained in possession of it for about one thousand years, but lost it when they ceased to follow the said laws through idleness caused by luxury.

I also ask the adherents of other religions to see for themselves whether the laws cited in these pages from the Qur-an are not designed to perfect human happiness here as well as in the world to come. This ought to be the sole object of every civilization and religion, for it consists chiefly in

two things: first, in reducing all the forces of Nature to our service; and secondly, in the observance by us of the highest moral standards.

Service to God is service to humanity, according to Islamic tenets. If men speak of other things, including even Devotion to God, they all tend to the same object. "Do you wish to love God?" so said Muhammad. "Then love His creatures." Half religion becomes perfected if we follow that dictum. The other half lies in discovering the means whereby that love may find its best expression by alleviating human misery.

THE OBJECT OF DIVINE REVELATION

"Read in the name of your Lord (Rabb) Who created. He created man from a clot. Read and your Lord (Rabb) is most honourable, Who taught to write with the pen, Taught man what he knew not" (Holy Qur-an, xcvi. 1—5.)

Such were the words that came to Muhammad in a voice like thunder as he lay alone in the cave of Hira, near Makka, lost in contemplation, with a

soul sick unto death and in despair for the universal evil that seemed in his time to have darkened the whole atmosphere of the world and to have reached its culminating point in Arabia. Corruption was rife all over the world before his advent. "Death—mental, moral, and spiritual—had overtaken the human race, and darkness prevailed everywhere, clouding the beliefs and perverting the actions of the people." Religions had, one and all, lost their healthy influence on the lives of their adherents. "The Christianity of the seventh century was itself decrepit and corrupt."[1] The Holy Qur-an thus briefly describes the conditions of that period: "Corruption has appeared in the land and the sea, on account of what the hands of men have wrought" (xxx. 41).

The words were spoken by a Mighty Form, an Archangel, says the Holy Prophet. Let materialists, if they will, regard it as a vision resulting from the Prophet's imagination; yet unless he was possessed of quite unusual

1. Muir.

imagination accompanied by supernatural foresight, materialists must be in error; since events that were presently to come completely disproved such theories. For the Revelation vouchsafed to the Holy Prophet was to be most clearly fulfilled. The sacred words not only foretold the great honour that was in store for the human race, the time for which had then arrived, but they also spoke of the one remedy that could avail to save it from the poison that was sapping its very life. The Revelation declared that the shape in which matter had become evolved in the human frame was not the final stage of its progress. It had no doubt reached finality in its material journey; but this finality was but the starting-point of coming stages in human advancement. The physical nature of man had given birth to something new [1] —human consciousness, something

1. "And certainly We created man of an extract of clay, Then We made him a small life-germ in a firm resting-place, Then We made the life-germ a clot, then We made the clot a lump of flesh, then We made (in) the lump of flesh bones, then We clothed the bones with flesh, then We caused it to grow into another creation" (Holy Qur-an, xxiii, 12—14).

differing in its vastness and other capabilities from anything to be detected in other animals. It, in fact, furnished a nucleus for further progress on the mental, moral, and spiritual planes.

In this connection the sacred words speak also of an attribute of God—that is to say, Rabb. The Arabic word that has been inadequately translated by the word "Lord" for want of a better rendering in English, does not only mean "creator," but signifies also the endowing with various capacities of everything in creation, and "the fostering of it in such a manner as to make it attain one condition after another until it reaches its goal of completion."[1] The same Rabb who, according to this Revelation, evolved a physically perfect creation like man out of a clot of blood, now intended to give him further privileges that would come to him through a new learning to be attained by him through the power to read and write.

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1. Muhammad 'Alî, in his English translation of the Qur-an, quoting from Iman Raghib's *Dictionary of the Qur-an*, which was written centuries before the theory of Evolution was started by Darwin and continued by Herbert Spencer.

The subsequent Revelations explained the above position in clearer terms when they said: "And when your Lord (Rabb) said to the angels, I am going to place in the earth one who shall rule (in it) . . . And He gave Adam knowledge of all the things, then presented them to the angels . . . And when We said to the angels, Make obeisance to Adam, they did obeisance" (Holy Qur-an, ii. 30, 31, 34).

The prayer of Jesus found its response from the Lord, some six hundred years later, in the revelations of Muhammad. The former prayed for the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth; while it was revealed to the latter that the time had come when man shall be shown such things as will enable him to rule the earth as God's Vicegerent. The above quotation also hinted at the means, fully set out later on in the Qur-an, by which this grand object was to be achieved. The angels, who according to Islamic teaching are the sentient beings which bring all forces of nature into operation, were ordered to pay homage to him and minister to his wishes; but he had first to acquire

"knowledge of all the things" in the universe, after which the movers of natural forces would obey him in actualizing the potentialities inherent in creation. The Qur-an also revealed that the things in nature, as has been said before, were not purposeless, but had all been designed for his service and benefit, and that he had been equipped with the capacities necessary for working out this design.

This was the main object of Divine Revelation, the object for which, according to Quranic teaching, Religion was given to man. Its purpose was to bring out his latent faculties, and carry him to the height of material, moral and spiritual prosperity and happiness.

I cannot understand how what calls itself Culture can conceivably take exception to a religion which came primarily for the very purpose which Culture itself professedly sets out to achieve. That purpose is to educate the human race to a civilization which will enable it to rule Nature on the morally highest principles—a proceeding which alone can serve to alleviate the misery and unhappiness which till

now have deprived man of much of the means for happiness at his disposal. Man in these days partially commands riches and wealth, but this affluence has in effect but added the more to his misery. The sad conditions that obtain all over the world to-day have arisen from the lack in us of that high morality which the working of God exhibits in Nature. The Divine lieutenancy spoken of in the above sacred words cannot become complete unless man brings forth a good moral and spiritual harvest keeping pace with his material progress. "The vicegerency of God" spoken of in the Qur-an, or "Thy kingdom come . . ." is not the dream of a religious crank. Its materialization, according to Islam, means that the achievement of that civilization lies in a study of the condition that obtains in the realm of Nature, where things necessary for our happiness are always in process of creation, and then are distributed in us according to our merits, but mostly on principles of broadmindedness. When man shall have come to work on these lines he will become God's Viceroy on earth. Even the Secularist could not

take exception to it, if he looked at the question merely from the point of view of utility. Capitalism, or socialism—now known as Communism—or any other system without desirable morals, cannot remedy the prevailing evil. Everything in Nature, except man, is happy and content. Man, the image of God, is labouring under misfortune in this respect, but he can easily avoid it if he will endeavour to possess himself of those morals and ethics which the Most High manifests in the universe.

An atheist may not believe in the existence of the Moral Ruler, though modern scientific research has brought him nearer to Monotheism, but he cannot, with all his sceptic tendencies, fail to observe generally intellect accompanied by liberality and compassion in the working of Nature. The Muslims ascribe all this to the Being they call Rabb; and supposing that supreme Moral Ruler to exist, we could banish evil and misery from human society if we were content to walk humbly with Him. This again I say is the chief object of Religion. All other aspects of it which unfortunately have

tended to monopolize human devotion are mere accessories, though some of them are essential means towards achieving the end. It is true that Religion has recently lost much ground. Though it is regaining it since the Great War, it is still treated as a back number by a large section of cultured people. It is not really wanted. That may fairly be termed the general position in the West. But the blame for this must be laid at the door of Religion by reason of the form it has generally been content to assume.

Religion, as I said before, has come to man in two forms from time immemorial—the Religion of commandments and Obedience, and the Religion of Expiation and Atonement. The former could appeal to reason and intelligence, since the rule of Law and Obedience permeates the whole of Nature and success lies in its observance. But unfortunately this aspect of Religion has, as Religion, been looked at askance, so that it has become merged in Ceremonialism—the spirit lost and the letter worshipped. It has ceased, therefore, to command any

respect from those who respect reason and look for utility in every pursuit. As to the Religion of Atonement, its tenets can only be accepted by the mutilation or total disregard of intelligence. Church dogma in the West is its principal specimen at present. Moreover, the blessed son of Mary was not the first Christ of whom the earth had heard. The ancient world spoke of many Christs before him. All of them repeated the same story of which we read in the Synoptic and Pauline literature. All of them were believed to have been born of a virgin and came to give their lives for the purpose of saving humanity from the penalty of sin. Belief in such a dogmatized theology is now on the wane; the effects of participation in the Eucharistic meals are treated either as mere imaginative consolation or in the light of "magic and charms of the mystery cult," as the Bishop of Birmingham calls them. Such theology, especially when it receives no support from Natural Theology, gives scant credit to the Deity, Who, as is believed by the Formal Church in the West, condemned the

whole human race for a wrong done by our first parents. The Deity also would see us to possess a strange notion of justice in according forgiveness to sinners only by the sacrifice of an innocent soul on the cross. Omniscience, it is believed, is one of His attributes; but He seems to evince here an awful ignorance in saddling us for four thousand years with Law when He, according to the Church tenets, knew that we were born in sin and therefore incapable of observing that Law, thereby obliging Himself to devise a new scheme for our regeneration. It is as inconceivable a plan as the belief in the efficacy of ceremonial piety for the cleansing of sin when unaccompanied by good actions.

Islam, however, came with quite a new conception of religion. It also gave a new significance to Divine worship. The uplifting of man from animality to the Divinity which seems to work in the "Civilization of Nature" was the religion taught by the Qur-an. Devotion to God, according to the same Book, consists chiefly in following such laws as may enable man to achieve this

purpose, the chief features of which are beneficence and compassion.

"It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but righteousness is this that one should believe in Allah and the last day and the angels and the Book and the prophets, and give away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and the beggars and for (the emancipation of) the captives, and keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate; and the performers of their promise when they make a promise, and the patient in distress and affliction and in time of conflict—these are they who are true to (themselves), and these are they who guard (against evil)" (Holy Qur-an ii. 177).

Let us examine the main features of our modern civilization. It consists in the discovery of the laws which are creating innumerable things for our benefit in the universe and then in the application of those laws to a like purpose. For example, we need perfect knowledge of mechanics and electricity. But we cannot improve on Nature in

this respect. In fact, we shall reach the highest point of attainment in them if we could find out the laws actually at work in the universe which govern mechanical and electrical forces. Whatever we have achieved hitherto in these departments is but an incomplete and slavish imitation of the Hand that is working there. There lies a wonderful adaptability in all things when applied to the manufacture of different kinds of machinery. Mechanism has commanded and dominated Nature; and so Spencer saw it. We do not create qualities in the various things that we use in mechanism. We only try to discover qualities already inherent in them and the laws prescribed for their working. Similarly, the world has made startling progress since we began to make research in the field of electricity. Here again we seek to discover the lines already marked out on which electricity works under the Hand of God. But mechanism and electricity ought not to exhaust our activities. We have to ransack the other stores of Nature if we wish to perfect our civilization. We have still to make discoveries concern-

ing innumerable components of the world. They are all made for the use of man, so the Qur-an taught us centuries ago, and goaded us to find out ways that might enable us to bring them to our service. Here again we shall have to walk humbly with the Lord. If all these phenomena are the work of Rabb (God), as the Qur-an says, the Book simply disclosed a truism when it declared that the object of creating man was to send him as His vicegerent on earth. The Book, therefore, gave him a religion under which he should become dyed in the colours of God; which means that he should act on earth as his Lord does in Heaven. This is what Jesus meant when he prayed, "Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven."

I have already remarked that with all our material achievements, misery and pain are still with us. Even those rolling in wealth wear a veritable mask which conceals pain possibly more poignant than that experienced by the victims of poverty; which clearly shows that Capitalism is no remedy. Capitalism cannot perfect our happiness. Be-

sides the personal troubles of those in opulence, riches induce crime in its various forms—theft, cheating, deception, fornication, prostitution, and other cognate evils. Neither is Communism the true alternative, for it kills every incentive for effort and hard work. If our earnings go to constitute national estate, and we are deprived of their ownership and only allowed a pittance out of our acquisitions for our own maintenance, it is sufficient to damp all our zeal in the making of wealth. Thus both Capitalism and Communism as they are understood to-day do no good to the human race, excluding each other as they do from their respective provinces. What we do need is a happy coalition of certain good principles in each of them. Ownership can only induce us to strain our nerves in the acquisition of wealth. But it needs, further, a liberal distribution among poorer men if we are to banish misery.

In short, we do need to follow Divine attributes in the creation and distribution of wealth; which is the condition precedent for soaring to the higher regions of the Divine Realm.

ANTHROPOMORPHISM AND ISLAM

In this respect Islam has been accused of *anthropomorphic* teachings. The Qur-an, it is alleged, assigns to God attributes such as belong to man. But this is not the case. The chief of these attributes were displayed by the Creator of the universe long before man appeared on the scene. The rest of them are only their offshoots. Natural Theology has, however, done great service to Islam in exonerating it from such a charge. It has also settled an old question which has been troubling men of a philosophic turn on this subject. They think that God is not only transcendental and unknowable in His Essence, but also in the matter of His attributes surpasses the bounds of human comprehension. He is an impersonal and—if the word be permitted—an unattributable God. This is the corner-stone of the received Buddhistic theology. Others think that the Creator, though absolutely unknowable in essence, as the Qur-an holds, has certain of the attributes that can come within our cognizance. In other words, He is a Personal God. But this

conception unfortunately went farther and clothed the Deity with anthropomorphic attributes. By others He was invested with all the human passions.

The Holy Qur-an has placed some of the excellent names of God before man to aid him in building up his moral fabric, and I believe it to be the best creed for our inspiration in all our activities ; yet it is alleged that the Book has only preached anthropomorphism. Even a smattering knowledge of the Qur-anic attributes of God would contradict any such allegations. The Book, no doubt, speaks of a Personal God, but one who in no case is an anthropomorphic Deity, *i.e.*, one fashioned after the human form and endowed with human passions. The Qur-anic Divine Attributes not only exclude even a semblance of our low passions from their scope, but also they negate their very existence. They will enable their owner amongst us to bring all his carnal passions under strict control and use them in their best form when required. The conception of an Impersonal God—the Deity of whose attributes we are totally

unable to conceive—no doubt provides a fascinating philosophy at its outset, but it brings no practical good to us, nor does it profit man in any way. Our worshipping instinct has always placed some Deity before it; we adore Him and receive all good inspirations from Him, in the moulding of our character, by contemplating His attributes. But the conception of an Impersonal God leads us to contemplate something that amounts to nothing. Contemplation without an objective is in itself an impossibility. Belief in an Impersonal God would tend to make us all agnostics and establish atheism in the long run, as it did in the subsequent development of Buddhism. Though it was an old conception in Hindu theology, and we read of it also in ancient Greek and Roman philosophies, yet it has received its greatest prominence in the teachings passing under the name of Buddha. The great Sage, in my humble opinion, could not be the author of ideas that proved so pernicious to theism; on the other hand, I find him speaking of "liberality and compassion" as the chief characteristics of the Divine Hand

in Nature. He therefore believes in a Personal God.

No doubt the Lord Buddha preached strongly against the anthropomorphism which was prevailing in the Hindu religion in his days, for it generated a very bad type of morality in its believers.

It is matter for great gratification that Natural Theology has solved these theological riddles propounded by various persuasions. It is reasonable to imagine that the transcendental God should not share attributes in common with His creatures, but Nature has something different to tell.

In their attempt to give God every human passion His worshippers under anthropomorphism have deified even man's lowest passions. All that is abominable in humanity appears in those Beings who grace the throne of Godhood in the pantheisms of Hindu, Greek, and Roman mythology. They come on the earth and enter into amorous relations with the wives of men and of each other. In a word, they indulge in all things fatal to morality and order.

Divine worship and adoration every-

where consist chiefly in doing things that are the pleasure of God and fulfil the requirements of His Attributes. Hence the temples of these gods were the scenes of obscenity, where all sorts of bacchanalian orgies were practised in the spirit of a true votary. The evil, unfortunately, did not remain confined to places of worship in the Puranic days in India—and this was the case everywhere in the world, especially at the time when Muhammad appeared—it was regarded as one of the essentials of sanctity, especially in the sacerdotal class.

Unfortunately this conception of an Impersonal God produced similar results though to a very limited extent. An Impersonal God must stand beyond any human limitations, as they think. It would be consistent with His Omnipotence if He remained independent of all human obligations that moral order requires. "God can speak a lie," so wrote an advocate of Omnipotence in his treatise on the subject which appeared from Ferozepur (India) some twenty years ago. Similar ideas gave the Deity certain other undesirable characteristics

under a system of anthropomorphic theology.

The Qur-an solved the difficult problem. God is not knowable. His essence stands beyond our perceptions, but He does possess qualities also which can come within human comprehension, and may inspire man with thought that can raise him from animality to the Divine precincts and make him a worthy ruler of God's kingdom on earth. If he has been fashioned after the image of God, he should have the capacity to become sooner or later clothed with Divine attributes. He will rise from animality, but with a consciousness that can develop and assume the Divine colour. He has also an imitative instinct. He needed a model. The Work and Word of God—Nature and Revelation—supplied him with the model. Man did not give morals to God, but God has planted His own morals in man—liberality, compassion, design, and intellect, with many other qualities found in the working of Nature, which existed before man was created. How can these morals be man's exclusive possessions?